

CHAPTER 24

MOTOR MARCHES AND CONVOYS

The wheeled vehicle driver must know specific procedures for maintaining convoy speed, halting, and handling breakdowns. The driver must also know convoy and aircraft loading signals as well as NATO convoy flags.

PROPER SPEED AND GAP

The road, weather, and amount of space needed between vehicles to allow for stopping without rear-end collisions and for letting faster-moving vehicles pull into the column after passing determine speed and gap.

Of all the space around your vehicle, the area ahead of the vehicle – the space you are driving into – is most important. You need space ahead in case you must suddenly stop. According to accident reports, trucks and buses most often run into the vehicle in front of them. The most frequent cause is following too closely. If the vehicle ahead of you is smaller than yours, it can probably stop faster than you can. This may cause you to crash into it if you follow too closely.

One good rule to determine how much space to keep in front of you is to allow at least one second for each 10 feet of vehicle length at speeds below 40 MPH. At greater speeds, add one second for safety. For example, if you are driving a 40-foot vehicle, leave 4 seconds between you and the vehicle ahead; in a 60-foot vehicle, 6 seconds. Over 40 MPH, you need 5 seconds for a 40-foot vehicle; 7 seconds for a 60-foot vehicle.

To know how much space you have, wait until the vehicle ahead passes a shadow on the road, a pavement marking, or some other clear landmark. Then count the seconds, one thousand and one, one thousand and two, and so on, until you reach the same spot. Compare your count with the rule of one second for every 10 feet of length. If you are driving a 40-foot truck and only count two seconds, you are too close. Drop back a little and recount until you have the right number of seconds of following distance. After some practice, you

will know how far back you should drive. When the road is slippery, you need more space to stop.

Maintain your proper place in the convoy. If you have no other orders, a good general rule is to keep a distance in yards that is twice the rate of speed at which you are driving. For example, if you are traveling at 25 MPH, leave 50 yards between your vehicle and the one just ahead at 30 MPH, 60 yards; at 35 MPH, 70 yards; and so forth. Remember, this distance is in yards, not feet. The number by which you multiply, in this case, 2, is called the speedometer multiplier (SM). The convoy commander may set a speedometer multiplier greater than 2.

In applying the speedometer multiplier, you must be able to judge distances. You can do this more easily if you practice estimating distances. Take a known distance, such as the length of a truck or the distance between telephone poles; observe carefully how that distance looks to you. Try this in different light conditions, such as day, night, and dusk. You will soon be able to estimate distances accurately.

VEHICLE FAILURES

If your vehicle fails while you are driving in a convoy, remember these basic rules:

- Signal a stop and pull off the road.
- Signal vehicles behind you to proceed.
- Correct the trouble if possible and fall back in the column at one of the breaks (halts). If you or a mechanic left with you cannot repair the trouble, wait for the trail officer and tell him your difficulties. He will make the necessary arrangements.

VEHICLE HALTS

A convoy halt is made for your personal convenience and for checking your vehicle. Make the at-halt

preventive maintenance check at each halt. Be sure to keep off the road if possible while checking your vehicle. If you must halt on the road, designate your assistant driver as a guard to warn other traffic.

AIRCRAFT-LOADING AND CONVOY CONTROL SIGNALS

Use and obey hand signals in a convoy just as you would when driving individually. In addition to the signals for right and left turns, stopping, and so forth, you must learn convoy control signals. (Signals used by personnel directing the loading of vehicles on aircraft are the same as those used for convoy control.) Whenever a march column is halted on a curve or downgrade, or whenever some drivers cannot see the signal, signals may be relayed along the column or transmitted by messenger to all concerned.

NATO CONVOY FLAGS

Mark each march unit of a convoy with flags 12 inches high and 18 inches long. The lead vehicle has a blue flag; the rear vehicle, a green flag. Mount the flags on the left front of the lead and trail vehicles, respectively. There they will not interfere with the driver's vision or with any functional component of the vehicle.

The convoy commander and march unit commander's vehicle must have a white and black flag on the left front bumper. This flag is divided diagonally from the lower left corner to the upper right corner. The upper left triangle is white; the lower right triangle, black. See FM 55-312 for additional information. OCONUS convoys must comply with MACOM and host nation regulations.